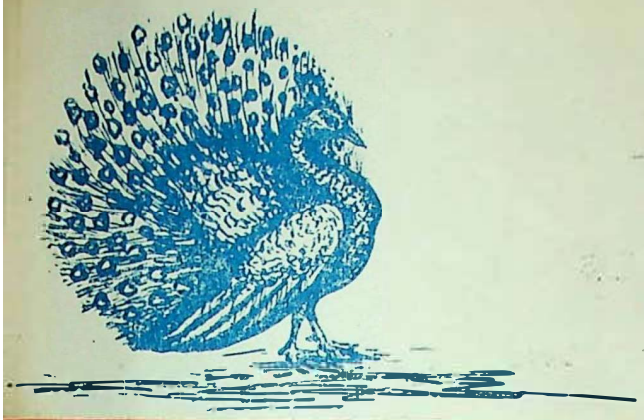
AASHEESH PITTIE,
14-7-370, BEGUM BAZAR
HYDERABAD-500 012.



MAYURA

Newsletter of the Bird Watchers' Club of Andhra Pradesh

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ACT BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

During the regular birdwatching trips, members of the Birdwatchers' Club were pained to see indiscriminate destruction of many beautiful natural rock formations around the city of Hyderabad by contractors of stone quarries for monetary considerations. These rock formations, besides providing great aesthetic appeal to the tourist, also shelter many scrub-country birds, smaller mammals and other fauna and flora. The rocky terrain near Himayatsagar lake on the outskirts of the city under destruction provides an excellent illustration of the point under consideration. Similarly, Hussainsagar tank linking Twin Cities of Hyderabad is getting polluted by industrial effluents from various factories. Smaller tanks -- one situated in Banjara Hills and another at Chilkoor - are either being polluted or prevented from filling up, to the detriment of birds and fishes which very much depend on tanks. These lakes are becoming an eye sore and are no more a place for relaxation.

Thoughtless destruction of many big trees, as the banyan trees situated near Mir Alam Tank, have deprived birds of their perching, roosting and feeding sites. The massive felling of huge trees within the compound of the Secretariat is really very painful and is indicative of extent of our apathy to the preservation of environment.

Wanton and unrestricted destruction of our natural resources such as trees, lakes, hills etc., is already having its own repercussions. Unless the consequences of such destruction are realised in time and a halt put to the harm being perpetuated to our own ecosystem before it is too late, nature will strike back with increased vehemence in the form of calamities like floods, drought and such other natural disturbances.

S. TEJ KUMAR

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For contributing articles to MAYURA and membership of the club please address Dr. S. Tej Kumar, Convenor, Birdwatchers' Club of Andhra Pradesh, Department of Entomology, College of Agriculture Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500 030. A.P.

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——— Edited by Dr. S. Tej Kumar.

BIRD WATCHING AT VELTUR TANK - BY S. ASHOK KUMAR, I.A.S.

While motoring along the National Highway No.7 on 2nd September, I spotted a small tank abutting the road at 122 K.M. stone. Parking my car on the roadside, I walked to the road margin and surveyed the tank. In the midist of the tank bed and at a safe distance from the Highway and the bund are about 30 Acacia Arabica trees. The tank is brimming with water because of freshes due to recent monsoon rains. The Acacia trees, thus insulated from human and animal interference, afford and ideal habitat for nesting and breeding. I found a mixed heronry co-existing with an extensive colony of voiceferous Baya birds. The heronry consists of Grey Herons, Little Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Cormorants, Pond Herons and Ibis. While the egrets are roosting in 11 trees, the Bayas have chosen two trees for their colony. It was almost dusk and against the backdrop of ash grey sky, I could not identify whether the Ibis are white or black. So I resolved to visit the tank again, armed with the binoculars.

On 19th September, I revisited the tank. The chwherd informed me that the tank goes by the name of Komati Kunta of Veltur village. As the Herons, Egrets and Ibis had not yet returned to their roosting place, I went over the tank bund to observe the Baya nests. I focussed my binoculars on the colony of nests suspended from the overhanging branches and found it to be that of the Black Breasted Weaver Bird. The male bird with its beautiful coat of breeding plumage - brilliant golden crown, white throat and black band below - looked exceedingly handsome. It was fascinating to watch the male bird flying from one nest to another and calling on the lady birds and finally making a dash to the unfinished green nest to complete it for another mate. The din of the Bayas was occasionally pierced by the croaking of few egrets incubating in the nests. I followed the thick tree branch with my binoculars and found a snake with brown and white bands lying in wait for its prey. I witnessed two egrets taking charge of incubating duties and relieving the other birds for foraging.

My digital blinked 5.45 p.m., when I sighted flocks of egrets winging their way from the eastern paddy fields to their roosting place. After circling over the tank twice or thrice, they landed on the tree branches and soon indulged in vocalisation. I counted 29 little Cormorants, 4 White Ibis and number of Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets, Grey Herons and Pond Herons. That the Little Egrets are breeding is evidenced by the long dropping crest of two narrow plumes. These plumes were strikingly beautiful whenever the bird moved its head. The cattle Egrets were also in breeding plumes - orange-buff head, neck and back. On the farthest tree I could see a long Common Kingfisher. My attention was drawn to the flight of two birds which landed on the lower branch of the nearest tree. Focussing my binoculars, I found them to be Pied Crested Cuckoo. The White tips of tail feathers and round patches on wings conspicuous during their flight were unmistakable. The din of the ubiquitous common Mynas drowned the crackle of the Egrets. The White Ibis silhouetted against the grey sky provided a magnificent view.

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